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City of Leesburg

Press Release

LEESBURG ADOPTS HISTORIC BUILDING CODE AMENDMENT

New Code Provides an Alternative for Historic Buildings to Meet Current Building Standards At Renovation or Rehabilitation and Maintain Historic Character

Leesburg, Florida, May 11, 2004: At their Regular Meeting the Leesburg City Commission unanimously approved an amendment to the Florida building codes that provide alternatives for building owners to preserve their historic buildings and comply with current building codes. “This will give the owners of all historic buildings in Leesburg the ability to bring back their buildings to a useful life”, said Bill Wiley, Planning & Zoning Manager, “and still maintain the historic character and appearance of these structures.”

The amendment provides a variety of construction alternatives for historic buildings throughout the city to meet the current standards for fire safety, means of egress (entry & exit), and general safety. The process allows building owners the ability to opt out of some building requirements by substituting higher scoring improvements in alternate categories. There are a total of 19 categories in each of the 3 primary areas to select alternative construction methods.

“This system goes beyond the standards for historic buildings in the general building codes” said Jay Connell, Leesburg Building Official, “the system allows owners to opt out of some requirements by providing higher levels of protection in others.” The new code will require an engineer to evaluate a qualified historic building for structural capacity to ensure it can meet the load requirements, including the wind load regulations. In addition, the roof and floors above the first floor must either meet current requirements or have supported the loads for at least 20 years without any visible signs of deterioration. “This is an advantage for historic

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building owners”, said Connell, “when the engineer demonstrates this capability it can substantially lower the cost of renovation”.

In order to qualify for inclusion in this new standard, the building must be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or be listed on a municipal register of historic properties, or be included in a historic district approved by the local historic preservation authority. Building that will not qualify are those that are new construction in a historic district, buildings that are reconstructed after demolition, or new additions to historic buildings. One final category of buildings are also not included. Those are: hospitals, nursing homes or other group facilities for health care, education or day care facilities.

Leesburg made the decision to be more proactive in the use of this ordinance from successful applications in other communities such as Tampa and Tavares. “These communities have been very successful in applying these standards to preserve the historic character of their entire community and to promote the preservation of many of their historic structures”, said Wiley.

For more detailed information about the Florida Building Code and the Historic Structure section or to obtain a copy, contact the City of Leesburg Building Official's office at 352-728-9750 , Monday thru Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.